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Asian Students' Preferences on Destinations, Choice Criteria and Purchase Process for Leisure Accommodation When Traveling in Europe.

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Abstract

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The purpose of the research was to discover preferences, choice criteria and decisive factors of purchase process regarding Asian students' leisure traveling within Europe.

The secondary data for this study was gathered from written materials such as books, academic publications, online articles, previous studies and reports. Besides, qualitative research approach was applied for empirical part. Methods of collecting primary data would be semi-structured theme interview and online open-ended survey. There were six interviewees and six online survey respondents who are Asian students having travelled or intentions to travel within Europe. All participants were exposed to the same set of questions, which was divided into three themes.

The results of this thesis show in-depth thoughts of Asian student travellers and reflect their travel preferences in Europe. Factors of a European destination that attracts the target group were revealed. Moreover, what Asian students search for in a leisure accommodation and significant influencers on their purchasing process were discussed in the study. Not only desires built from past travel experiences but also wishes as well as deal-breakers for future travel plans of target group were studied to unveil their in-depth thoughts. The work was completed from the student's perspective and should be the initial reference for enhanced studies.

Key words: student travel, European travel destinations, choice criteria, purchase process, short-term accommodation

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1   Introduction

With easy accessibility to the public transport and the right to travel across different European countries with the Schengen Visa, the continent has long become appealing destination for tourists from all over the world. The emerge of backpacking travel has taken off over the past decade owing to its convenience and affordability; especially among students, who have the flexibility and fair amount of free time as well as little travel budget. According to "Industry Review No. 5 Executive Summary: Global Data, Statistics and Trends II" of World Youth Student & Educational Travel Confederation (WYSE 2015), as a sector of global tourism, youth and student travel has valued approximately 203 billion of US dollars, proving its constant growth rate. It can be concluded that student travel segment is earning its importance to which researchers and marketers should shift their attention.

On the other hand, in the same paper of World Youth Student & Educational Travel Confederation, it is stated that the top accommodation choice for student tourists is hostel (WYSE 2015); however, as a student who was experienced a lot of backpacking travel, the author has noticed the potentials of other kinds of short-term lodging, such as homestays, apartment rentals and vacation rentals. This justifies the choice of doing research on this growing type of vacation accommodation, called short-term vacation rental (STR). This specific term is mainly used in the United States.

In short, this research study on Asian students' travel preferences and purchase process specifically with respect to leisure travel in Europe was conducted not only for reference but also for its practical needs of encouraging current and future STR hosts to deliver better product and service for targeted customers. More precisely, this thesis paper should be a guide for STR hosts to improve their listings and service for the purpose of having higher bed occupancy and the initial reference of the target group's insights for market researchers, tourism scholars and students.

In this thesis research, there are two main aims. The first aim of it is to figure out what the Asian student travellers are in favour of while choosing destination

and accommodation for their trips around Europe. The second aim reaches out for what has influenced the above-mentioned target group the most during their booking process. Accordingly, to simplify the main aims, the author came up with the research question, which is: "What are the in-depth thoughts and decisive factors of the above-mentioned target group in choosing destination and accommodation for their trips in Europe?".

The work was completed from the student's perspective and should be the initial reference for enhanced studies. Results of this study may not aim to generalize the whole Asian student population concerning the research topic.

2   Student travel

2.1   Definition

Student travel has placed its crucial role in the world tourism for decades; nevertheless, not until the breakthrough of number of international students all around the world and the advancement of the Internet, scholars and marketers have shifted their attention to student market segment. Up to recent, studies with different purposes offered various definitions of student and youth travel, such as:

- Demographically, student travel is defined by a segment of 15 to 26-year-old tourists (age limits differ extensively) carrying on tourism activities.
- Style-accordingly, student travel can be referred to some kinds of tourism like independent travel or backpacking.
- Purpose-accordingly, student travel concerns trips with study as an end goal.

However, in this study, the author would follow the definition proposed by WYSE Travel Confederation, which understands student and youth travel as "*all independent trips for periods of less than one year by people aged 16-29 which are motivated, in part or in full, by a desire to experience other cultures, build life experience and/or benefit from formal and informal learning opportunities*

outside one's usual environment" (UNWTO & WYSE, 2008, p.1). To accentu-
ate, it is considered as student travel in this study when the student tourist
makes journeys on his/her own, without the company of parents or guardians.

2.2 Target group: Asian students

According to ICEF Monitor in StudentUniverse & SKIFT (2014), Asian students
accounted for 53+ percent of international student mobility in the world. This
can be comprehended that for such a big continent like Asia, the number of stu-
dents who travel is one of the largest on this planet. Nonetheless, considered as
one delimitation of this thesis paper, the author only studies in-depth thoughts of
students who are from countries with leading number of student travellers. More
specifically, these countries are, as shown in figure 1, China and South Korea
(Eastern Asia), Vietnam and Malaysia (South East Asia), India and Pakistan
(South Asia) (StudentUniverse & SKIFT 2014, p.12). The investigated group
would be in between 18 and 30 years old, following studies in colleges, institu-
tions, universities, or universities of applied sciences, who are called Millennials
by demographers. They either have travelled or have intentions to go on excur-
sions around Europe. On the other hand, in terms of traveling, they should en-
joy the privilege of student discounts and benefits.
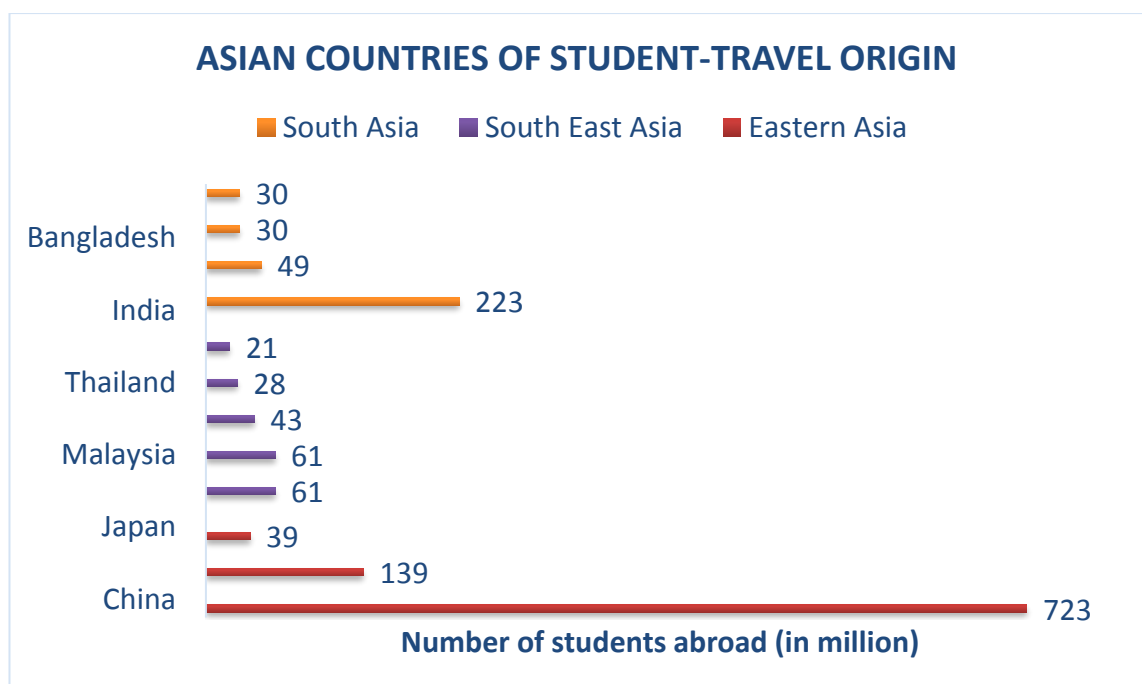
ASIAN COUNTRIES OF STUDENT-TRAVEL ORIGIN

■ South Asia   ■ South East Asia   ■ Eastern Asia

Country	Value 1	Value 2	Value 3
Bangladesh	30	30	49
India	223		
Thailand	21	28	43
Malaysia	61	61	
Japan	39		
China	139	723	

Number of students abroad (in million)

**Figure 1 Asian countries of student-travel origin (Source: ICEF Monitor
2014 as cited in StudentUniverse & SKIFT 2014, p.12)**

2.2.1 Eastern Asia

Representative of this subgroup should be Chinese students since they exceptionally outnumbered others in those who travel (Figure 1). Stating in the ITB World Travel Trends Report 2016/2017, a tourism specialist and Honorary Director of the Tourism Research Centre of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, professor Zhang Guangrui suggested that Chinese tourists have recently shifted their interest in extensive and irrational spending on shopping to a more deliberate level, especially the young. On the other hand, professor Zhang also added that Chinese travellers have become more skilled in investigating destinations as well as tourism product and services using the Internet and via media advertising. In the same report, a survey in September 2016 of World Travel Monitor® specified that the concern of safety when traveling and safe destinations is high among Chinese travellers. (IBT Berlin 2016, pp.14-15.)

Besides, South Koreans followed up Chinese in the number of students who travel. The country has been recorded as the third in Internet penetration among those in Asia with 92.6 percent of population using Internet up to December 2017 (Internet World Stats 2017). Moreover, it is South Korea that have the youngest Internet using age in the world, starting from age 10. Almost 100 percent of South Korean students have access to the Internet to socialize, get information and news as well as do online shopping, which includes booking and making reservations for traveling. With such easy access to giant sources online, they have a tendency not to travel in package tours but to organize their own journeys. (Singapore Tourism Board 2015, pp. 6-8.)

2.2.2 South East Asia

With the same number of 61 million students who were documented to having travelled, Vietnam and Malaysia have been the two regional representatives (Figure 1). In an article of Mai (2016) on Vietnamnet.vn, the number of citizens with Vietnamese nationality study abroad, mostly self-funded, is 130,000 which was much more than a decade ago, stated in the government report to the National Assembly. The statistics has proven one fact that Vietnamese youth tourists have recently had significantly better financial opportunities to travel the

globe. Besides, most of them expressed that they would rather go on package tours than self-organized overseas trips. Main reasons are the equitable and fair prices, worries-free accommodation and transportation as well as the profusion of tour programs. (W&S Market Research 2013.) Nonetheless, for Vietnamese students already studying abroad, backpacking and self-organized journeys are quite more popular; even though there is little information and research on the issue.

Quite the same as other nationalities listed, young Malaysians have been inspired to travel by information found via their access to the Internet, mostly with their smartphones on social media networks. In fact, the action of using the Internet involves in many stages of the Malaysian travel process. Not only that they base their travel plan on online researches, but they also rely on online websites or apps to decide their activities during the trips; they would also use social media networks like Facebook or Instagram to share contents and feedbacks about their journeys. (VASE.AI 2017.)

2.2.3 South Asia

Figure 1 has also shown that India drastically surpasses other South Asian nationalities in the number of student travel with 223 million in year 2014, 174 million more than the follow-up nationality in this subgroup of South Asia, which is Pakistan. Implying within the text in a report of UNWTO & ETC (2009), Indian travellers recently have had intentions to enjoy life much more than before, especially the young. This refers to their spending amount on traveling have risen though not excessively; hence, trips to Europe are not an exception (despite that the Indian travellers consider this destination as "high prestige" and "the ultimate destination"). On the other hand, with that image of Europe as an attractive but unique and different from their own country, Indian travellers would be at ease to go on European excursions in groups or packaged tours. Another interesting characteristic that differs Indian travellers from the others from Asia is their travel motivation from movies. Whilst the Internet takes over the inspiration power in other Asian countries, Bollywood movies tend to influence travel decision of the Indians. Last but not least, safety concerns and visa issues pro-

cess are also those that worry the Indian travellers the most. (UNWTO & ETC 2009, pp. 74-75.)

Speaking about the Pakistani travellers, there are some facts to initially bear in mind. Firstly, most of Pakistani are Muslims so religious rituals are substantial to them, affecting their traveling process and behaviours. Secondly, gender inequality in mobility in general (Muhammad 2016) and in tourism, should also be a crucial point. Furthermore, there is little data about Pakistan's outbound tourism and travellers' characteristics; however, considering two above-mentioned facts when discussing the number of Pakistani youth travellers, it could be interpreted that most of them are male.

3 European travel destination favourites of students

3.1 Definition

Travel destination, or tourism destination, has been studied in literature for decades. From different perspective and context of the study, the definition of that varies. Leiper (1995) defined destination as a mixture of all the products, services, natural and man-made attractions, as well as the location itself that are attractive enough to tourists resulting in their visits to a particular place. This definition is considered simultaneously from both the supply (by means of indicating the consolidation of products and services provided) and demand side (the desires and motivations to travel to along with perceptions of tourists about a specific place). Along the lines, "travel destination" was explained by Hu and Ritchie (1993) as one kind of consumer goods, specifically "package of facilities and services". Bieger (2000) in Pechlaner, H. & Weiermair, K. (2000) further added that as a tourist product, different tourism destinations can be competitive against each other in the market. In this thesis, the author compiles distinctive definitions of travel destination in the aforementioned literature, understanding the term as a geographical space providing all tourism products, services and activities that not only attracts but also delivers holiday experiences to tourists and competes against one another by profitability purpose.

Particularly in this case study, European travel destinations are those located within the boundaries of European continent. Geographically, it can be a country, city, region, or area and together with all products and services offered by the locals that are interesting enough to many tourists actually to visit. This section distinctively concerns travel destinations in favour of the target group of students, who are currently assumed as Millennials. In other words, any travel destinations that draw a large number of students paying visits to are being considered an example of the phrase, such as France, Spain or Italy (WYSE 2015). However, in this study, to be on a more certain scale, the author refers European destinations to European cities, not the whole country. Explanation stated here is the diversity of tourism resources of different cities in the same country. For instance, public transportation system in Helsinki, Finland is unlike that in Turku, Finland; or prices (cost of living) in Amsterdam is much higher than that in Rotterdam.

3.2 Factors attracting international students

Finding an explanation for the reasons why particularly-profiled tourists or travellers select their travel destination, Dann (1977) suggested the "push and pull framework". Both push and pull factors are those that attract and stimulate tourists' traveling by emphasizing on their demands of a specific travel experience. Whereas the "push factors" are related to needs and wants of the travellers, also known as internal forces; the "pull factors", as external forces, are characteristics of a travel destination, or destination's attributes, that can pull tourists to the place itself, such as nature, climate, culture, goods and service, price, etc. (Dann 1977, p.185.) In the pursuit of the core objective of this part of the thesis, the author only studies the "pull factors"; which in this case are factors attracting international students to European destinations. As associating with certain tourism destinations, dissimilar pull factors were defined. Resulting from analysis from different literature, the author of this thesis produced a list of common destination's attractive attributes that concern European cities and the target group, which are: price competitiveness, history and culture, entertainment, scenery and natural assets, local services and attitude.

Forsyth and Dwyer (2009) argued that among the destination competitiveness, price competitiveness is one of the most critical components. They also added that tourists usually compare prices between the travel origin and that of the destination, or of other alternatives. There are stereotypes that the perception of price to students should be low, or that students are into cheaper choices of products and services. Nonetheless, this should not be seriously considered. In fact, young people tend to spend the largest proportion of their income in terms of international trips, comparing to any other group (UNWTO & WYSE Travel Confederation 2008.)

For a continent with long history and rich in culture like Europe, it is necessary to take culture into account as a common pull factor. In addition, cultural tourism has grown into a mass market for this industry (Miller 1997, p.7). Correspondingly, European Commission (2018) estimated that cultural tourism accounts for 40 percent of all European tourism. In particular, a study about travel motivation of Chinese travellers to Europe discovered that the interest in history and understanding about cultural landmarks are one of the best motivations of generation Y to visit Europe (Pung & Chiappa 2018).

For such target group as Millennials who are in their twenties, entertainment in destination is reasonably considered as one significant pull factor. Entertainment appears in many kinds such as nightlife, theme parks, gambling, shows and events, etc. Pine and Gilmore (1999) proposed entertainment as the most basic of four "realms of customer experience", reflecting those that make customers smile. Moreover, almost half of the respondents in Richard's survey (2002) expressed their pursuit of entertainment even in cultural attractions.

Besides artificial assets, appealing scenery and other natural assets to some certain destination are the main attractive attributes (Formica 2004, p.39). In some previous study, this factor was proved to weigh more than the price factor (Lohmann & Kaim 1999, p.61) and universally accepted as an important element that defines a desirable destination (Hu & Ritchie 1993, p.32).

According to Hanafiah, Azman, Jamaluddin & Aminuddin (2013), travellers' satisfaction level and intention to promote the destination through word of mouth

are considerably boosted by the positive attitude of and service provided by the local community. Other researchers such as Andriotis & Vaughan (2003) also added that such greatly satisfying trips of tourists can optimistically affect the success of a certain destination. As a matter of fact, regarding the Asian demography, 42 percent of the travellers expressed to choose the destination due to its culture and people (TripAdvisor 2016).

4 Accommodation preferences of student travellers

4.1 Definition and terminology origin of short-term rental

Along with the development of tourism, new alternatives to traditional type of accommodation have appeared. Among them, there is one that is growing rapidly, yet hardly has an official terminology. Short-term rental (STR), or vacation rental, is a quite new word originally from and commonly used in the United States. Genuinely, this concept is termed differently in different parts of the world. In this study, the author would familiarize readers with "short-term rental", the meaning of which is self-explanatory. More creditably, many governor official websites of the United States defined STR as the leasing out, no matter wholly or partly, of a dwelling unit such as a furnished house, apartment, or room, etc., mostly to tourists on a temporary duration of less than a month (Miami-Dade County 2018; State of Idaho 2017; City of Franklin TN 2018.) Common examples of STR are rooms, apartments, villas, cottages, condominiums, etc.

4.2 Popular channels for STRs

The expansion of Internet accessibility has created opportunities for peer-to-peer business ideas to prosper, providing online markets for suppliers and buyers. In the context of tourism, this opens doors to individuals seeking short-term rentals for leisure purpose, or on the other hand, renting their properties out. There are platforms allowing members to swap their accommodations temporarily (Love Home Swap, Home Exchange), or those whose members can offer free stays for travellers (Couchsurfing, Warm Showers), or those letting members rent a room or a whole place to tourists (Airbnb, HomeAway, Homestay).

In addition, so popular this phenomenon is that established online travel agencies have implemented this business idea into their strategies. (Inkson & Minnaert 2018, p. 17.) For instance, TripAdvisor owns Flipkey; Expedia owns HomeAway; and Booking.com offers apartments, homestays, etc.

4.3 The rise of Airbnb

With 4 million listings and 150 million users (Craft 2017) in 9 years since its foundation in 2008, Airbnb has been considered as "the best-known sharing economy platform for accommodation" (Inkson & Minnaert 2018, p. 17). Briefly, Airbnb is a private company that provides hospitality service and an online marketplace for STRs to be leased and rented. In other words, customers of Airbnb are both hosts and tourists; and its revenue comes from fees collected after a successful booking, 3 percent of commission from hosts and 6 to 12 percent of transaction fees from travellers. (Reillier & Reillier 2017, p. 45). Zervas, Proserpio and Byers (2017) discovered that hotels serving a lower-end customer segment have experienced the loss of their guests owing to the rise of Airbnb, however, the fact is apparently applied to Texas region of America. Many studies implemented to find out the impact of Airbnb on various parts of the world show different results. For instance, Fissha and Shrestha (2017) and Neeser (2015) ascertained that hotels in the Nordic countries are not affected by Airbnb supply. Meanwhile, Choi, Yoon, Jung, Ryu & Kim (2015) found out that there is slightly negative impact on budget hotel revenue in South Korea upon the appearance of Airbnb listings. In addition, the major effect of Airbnb supply takes place while hotels in the market are nearly fully-booked. In other words, at this certain point, room rates of the hotels are constrained due to lower price of Airbnb listings. (Farronato & Fradkin 2018.) Reasonably explaining this fact, Silva's research (2017) showed that Airbnb provides accommodation serving different customers' needs and wants from that of hotels', such as the ability to socialize with local host, or the travellers' demand for a unique property.

5 Purchasing process of travel products

5.1 Definition

Purchasing process is simply a procedure of buying goods and services. However, some tourism scholars believe that in case of travel products and services, the act of purchasing would be more complicated. (Inkson & Minnaert 2018, p. 93; Gursoy 2011, p. 68.) They explained that the practice of information search when a traveller decides to buy a tourism product is substantially different comparing to other convenience products. For instance, fluctuating prices of flights could affect the buying decision of a traveller when booking independently. In other instances, such as choosing a destination or an accommodation, the level of involvement in information search of consumers is significantly higher. For the core aims of this study, the author decided to use the traditional model of decision-making, which Kotler & Keller (2012) explained in detail; the five stages of the consumer purchasing process including: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour.

5.2 Need recognition

Kotler & Keller (2012) pointed out that this is the first stage of the purchasing process, when a customer figures out the existence of a need or problem. Many discussed needs and wants of customers, however, as cited in Seeley (1992), Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) has been widely adopted in various study fields for both its simplicity and practicality, despite the criticising about the theory being too general. Initially, Maslow developed the work in his context of clinical psychology, stating the five needs of a human (Figure 2).
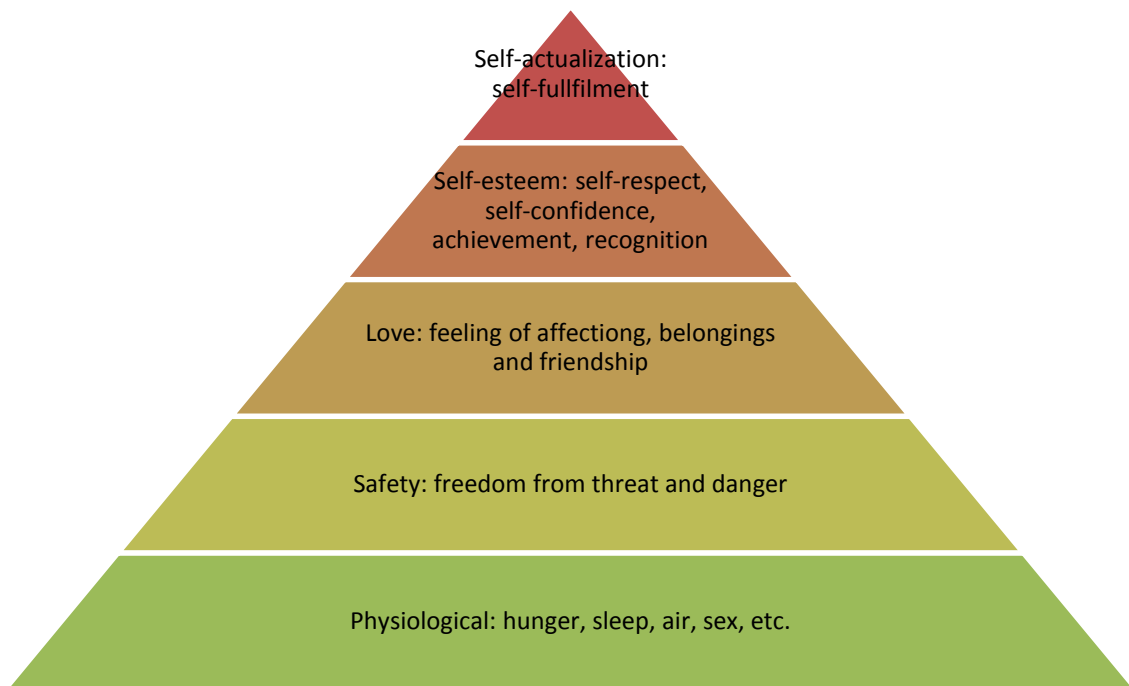
Figure 2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943)

Maslow discussed that when all needs of one level are satisfied, one is no longer motivated by those needs and is moving to the higher level. All the needs affect the behaviour of a consumer, hence, influencing his/her buying decision. On the other hand, diverse studies proved that travelling can fulfil different levels of needs. Moreover, as consumers realize, specifically a travel product, could satisfy their needs, they have generated a want, leading to the extensive information search (Stankevich 2017). Thus, influential factors of a traveller's decision-making process could be discovered by applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory into tourism context (Seeley 1992). This helps so much on understanding travellers' behaviours and developing marketing strategy (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997).

5.3   Information search and purchase platform

Stankevich (2017) indicated that an information search is the second stage in the whole process of purchasing. Simultaneously, consumers would look for internal and external information sources to evaluate before coming to a decision. While internal sources are past experiences of the product from the memory of buyers, external sources are family and friends' recommendations or public sources like reviews or marketing sources.

Especially for travel products, those can only be purchased or booked in advance from a distance, unlike the tour package that can be simply purchased through tour operator. Hence, means of booking or purchasing tourism products are telephone calls, emails or online platforms such as websites, online travel agents (OTAs), social media, sharing economy, etc. Besides, when outlined the seven stages of leisure travel accommodation, Gunn (1989) agreed that accumulation of mental image of destination from various sources will then be modified during the stage of information search and furthermore, also in the evaluation of alternatives phase. This can be concluded that choosing a destination for leisure travel might be different from other travel products. Likewise, in a study of Moutinho (1987) he reckoned a destination choice as an obligatory sub-decision that comes after the arise of tourism needs and stage of information search, however, before travel preparations including purchasing other travel product such as booking accommodation or transportation.

5.4 Evaluation of alternatives and choice criteria

After an extension search of information, a consumer will come up with a set of alternatives which are potential to purchase. Next, the consumer may choose one of the key attributes, such as prices, quality, brands, etc., to be the base of their final decision to buy. These vital characteristics, or choice criteria, are usually drawn out from "moments that matter", which could be personal affection with products or influence and giving in to marketing or advertisement. (Stankevich 2017.) Hence, each individual may have assorted choice criteria which they use to evaluate options and justify their choice, depending on their segmented profiles and other environmental factors as well as market stimuli.

5.5 Motivation of international youth travellers

Mentioned in the previous part of this thesis, "push and pull" model by Dann (1977) has been used by many scholars and researchers to explain what makes tourists travel. In this part, the push factors, describing internal forces of travellers that encourage them to go on journeys, would be studied to understand motivation of international youth travellers, then their choice criteria. Tak-

ing Dann's push and pull model (1977) as the base, Crompton (1979) expanded the study and related the push factors with:

- seven socio-psychological motives: escape from perceived ordinary environment, self-exploration, relaxation, regression and adventure, prestige, tightening kinship relationship, and facilitation of social interaction.
- two cultural motives: education and novelty.

In a survey of the International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC) and the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) 2002 with 1,630 response from forty-two different nationalities reported in 2004 by Richard & Wilson, the key motivations of international youth travellers were discovered. They are culture exploring and excitement seeking. Other relatively significant ones are earning knowledge, relaxing and social interacting such as communicating with locals or visiting friends and relatives. On the other hand, Richard & Wilson (2004) also mentioned European destinations were correlated with leisure travel of which the motives are relaxation and having a good time.

5.6 Purchase and post-purchase

The evaluation stage would go on until the best is deal found subjectively to the choice criteria of buyers. However, there is often a gap of time between the purchase decision and closing the deal. It happens more often for complicated purchase, as consumers usually experience a short period of having intention to buy before the actual purchase (Stankevich, 2017).

Post-purchase is the final stage of a complete purchasing process. This is when the buyers determine the level of satisfaction for their purchase's outcome. Kotler and Keller (2012) stated that not only the perceived performance of the product but also the expectation of the consumer decides to what extent they are satisfied. Furthermore, either good reviews or bad complaints need to be monitored and handled carefully, especially online reviews.

6 Methods

6.1 Overview

Unlike quantitative method which collects limited information from a large number of samples, qualitative approach gathers "rich information" from relatively fewer cases. Such information that is called "rich" refers to the respondents' emotions and feelings, behaviours, experiences, etc. and is not constrained by any researcher's design framework (questionnaires). (Veal 2006, p.193.) Furthermore, Kraus & Allen (1998) cited by Veal (2006) mentioned: *"… In such an individualistic and diversified field as recreation and leisure, there ought to be a place for research of a more deeply probing, intuitive, or philosophical nature."* This describes the ability of this method to understand matters, rather than measure them. In short, Veal (2006, p. 195) enlisted the following advantages of qualitative over quantitative approach:

1. The nature of leisure, a qualitative experience, correlates with this method.
2. This approach engaged more to people with unique personality.
3. The results are easier to comprehend than statistics of quantitative research.
4. By investigating into life history, this method helps to discover individual change in respondents' mind and behaviours over time. Contrastingly, quantitative approach tends to look into current situation.
5. Means of qualitative research such as interview enables researcher to examine attitudes and gestures of respondents via face-to-face interactions.

Thus, the author of this thesis believed qualitative approach to be appropriate for such chosen topic, so as to comprehend in-depth thoughts of students as customers, specifically the experiences affecting their preferences and purchasing decisions.

However, there are also some limitations regarding qualitative method which should be taken into considerations. Veal (2006, p.193) implied that the formation of interview questions and data collection is time consuming; yet there

are vague scientific measurement tools to analyse data, hence, the tendency of being biased is high. He, likewise, added such small sample size cannot genuinely speak for the whole population.

6.2 Data collection tools

Because there are geographical challenges preventing the sufficient collecting of data, the author chose to use two tools, which are semi-structured interview and open-ended survey. Firstly, respondents reside in different regions in the world. Secondly, such failure on arranging appointments between interviewer and interviewees led to the settlement of online open-ended surveys.

6.2.1 Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interview is a powerful tool to explore people's behaviours and points of view (Teijlingen 2014). Since this study is about students' destination preferences and accommodation choice criteria, implementing the afore-mentioned method is considered appropriate. In a nutshell, semi-structured interview can be understood as having simple conversation in which the "interviewer" knows what topics they want to cover, hence having a set of questions prepared. However, the conversation varies depending on the circumstances and the responses of the "interviewees". (Fylan 2005, p. 65.) Hence, follow-up questions shall be asked in order to get deeper insights of respondents as well as clarify unclear answers. In addition, recording is indeed necessary for the success of this method. As a matter of fact, taping and note taking are two common ways that researchers use. (Veal 2006, p. 200.) The author specifically chose audio recording with the consent of the respondents for the complexity of questions content, plus note taking is time-consuming and negatively affect the interviewer's focus during conversations.

6.2.2 Open-ended online survey

A survey containing open-ended questions allows respondents to freely express their thoughts about the topic in their own words (Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld & Booth-Kewley 1997, p. 26). Specifically, an opened-ended survey carried out online nullifies distance challenges mentioned in the above part. In addition,

Veal (2006) emphasized that by attempting e-survey, respondents access a customized Internet site to complete prearranged questions in the electronic form. In that way, researcher can retrieve responses instantly and cost-efficiently. In this study, the author chose Google form as the online survey platform for open-ended questionnaires. Moreover, respondents approaching this online form will also answer the same set of main and follow-up questions used in semi-structured interview. However, it is inadequate not to mention the drawbacks of this tool. First and foremost, Edwards *et al.* (1997) suggested that finishing an open-ended survey is exhausting, thus, questions toward the end are more likely treated perfunctorily. Second, online survey depends strictly on an access to the Internet (Veal, 2006, p.244). Last but not least, the analysis of open-ended survey method, from the researcher's point of view, takes a significant amount of effort and time (Edwards *et al.* 1997, pp. 26,27).

6.3 Data collection process

6.3.1 Questions formation

Questions had been formed simultaneously with the completion of theoretical part. The author had studied qualitative questions topic, then figured out the suitable ones for the interview and open-ended survey: Behavioral, Opinions/Values, Feelings and Demographics/Background. Then, following the specific goals of the core study, the author created three main themes for interview questions, listed respectively:

1. Preferences on European destinations: consists of 9 questions, finding out Asian students' experiences on traveling in Europe and their opinions, motivations and wishes for future traveling.
2. Choice criteria of leisure accommodation (STRs): consists of 8 questions, examining the target group's experiences and wishes regarding both leisure rentals and the hosts, as well as their budget for those.
3. Decision-making of travel products: consists of 5 questions, discovering in-depth thoughts of Asian students on evaluating alternatives which affect their decision of booking STR.

Those also included follow-up questions proposed after main questions, which helped to clarify initial responses of participants.

6.3.2 Sampling method

Sampling, according to Henry (1990), is necessary since collecting data from everyone in the population is usually impossible. Additionally, he justified that cost-effective and time-saving determine the significance of sampling in a research carry-out. There are many sampling techniques yet categorized in two types: probability and non-probability sampling. As this research is qualitative, non-probability sampling was used. This technique was explained as choosing samples out of the research population based on subjective judgement, not random selection. (Henry 1990.) Specifically, in this study, selective sampling was utilized over considerable types of non-probability sampling. The method enables researchers to concentrate on particular attributes of interested population to gather possible answers (Henry 1990). Accordingly, the author chose the respondents based on these criteria elaborated in Figure 3.
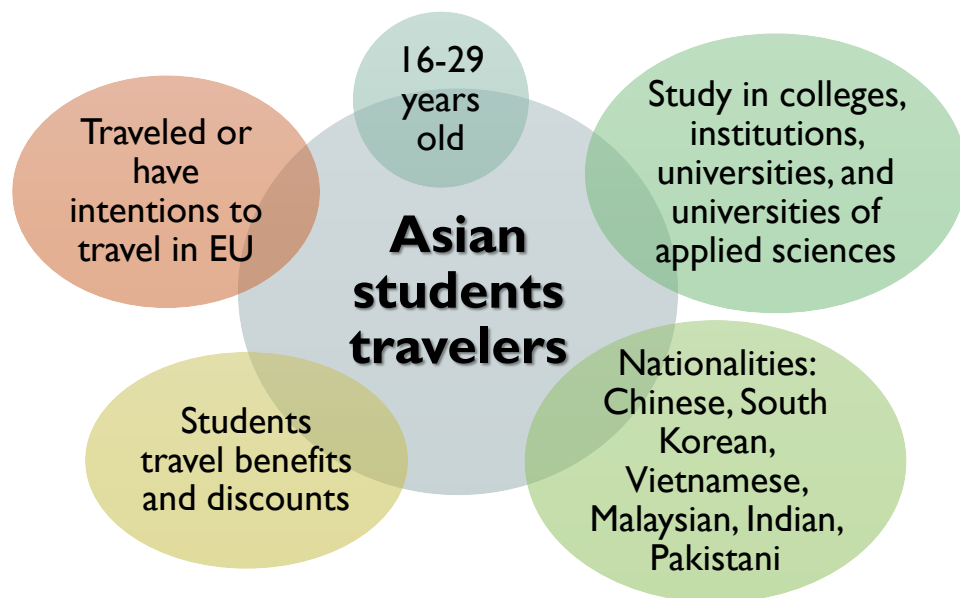
Figure 3 Sampling attributes

Last but not least, owing to limited resources of budget and time, the respondents should be reached within the author's social network.

6.3.3   Recruitment process and data documentation

Interviewees and survey doers were recruited via "word of mouth". Acquaintances and friends in the author's social network whose profiles match the target group criteria mentioned in previous sections were invited to interview. The author initially contacted and communicated with potential respondents through Facebook messenger and WhatsApp. The conversation started with the researcher's self-introduction; main purposes and core concepts of the thesis; structure and estimated length of the interview; confidentiality assurance of responses. Had both parties reached an agreement on date and time, the interview was conducted via Skype. There is only one conversation which was settled face-to-face. In other cases, when an appointment was unable to be made, the respondents had another choice to complete an online open-ended survey.

6.4   Demographic of participants

In total, there are 12 participants, six of whom were interviewed and the others filled in the survey. Names and gender of respondents were promised not to be recorded due to the core of this study placing value on their age, nationality and country of study. For the purpose of referencing during the analysis phrase, 6 interviewees were labelled from S1 to S6 and 6 online survey participants were labelled from OS1 to OS6 chronologically. Demographics of respondents are shown in table 1.

LABEL	AGE	NATIONALITY	COUNTRY OF STUDY
S1	24	Pakistani	USA
S2	23	Chinese	Finland
S3	23	Indian	France
S4	24	Indian	The Netherlands
S5	22	Chinese	The Netherlands
S6	23	Pakistani	USA
OS1	24	Indian	Malta
OS2	22	Korean	The Netherlands
OS3	22	Korean	The Netherlands
OS4	21	Malaysian	Malaysia
OS5	24	Chinese	Netherlands
OS6	21	Vietnamese	Finland

Table 1 Demographics

Presented below are the charts of analysed data of participants' demographics.
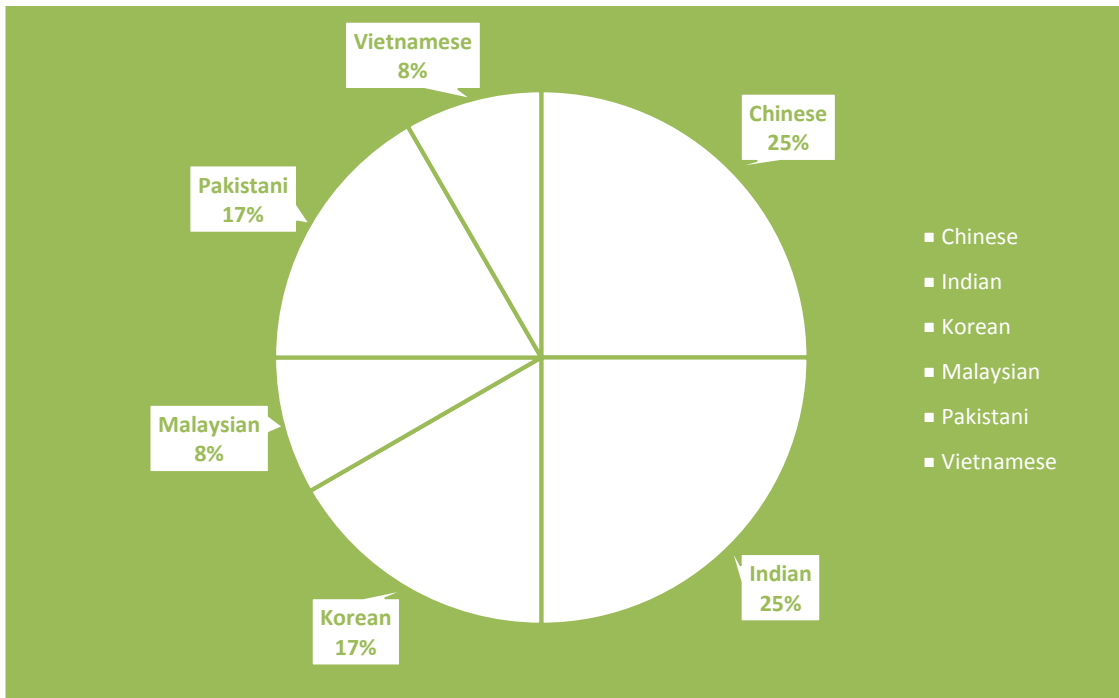
Figure 4 Participants' nationality
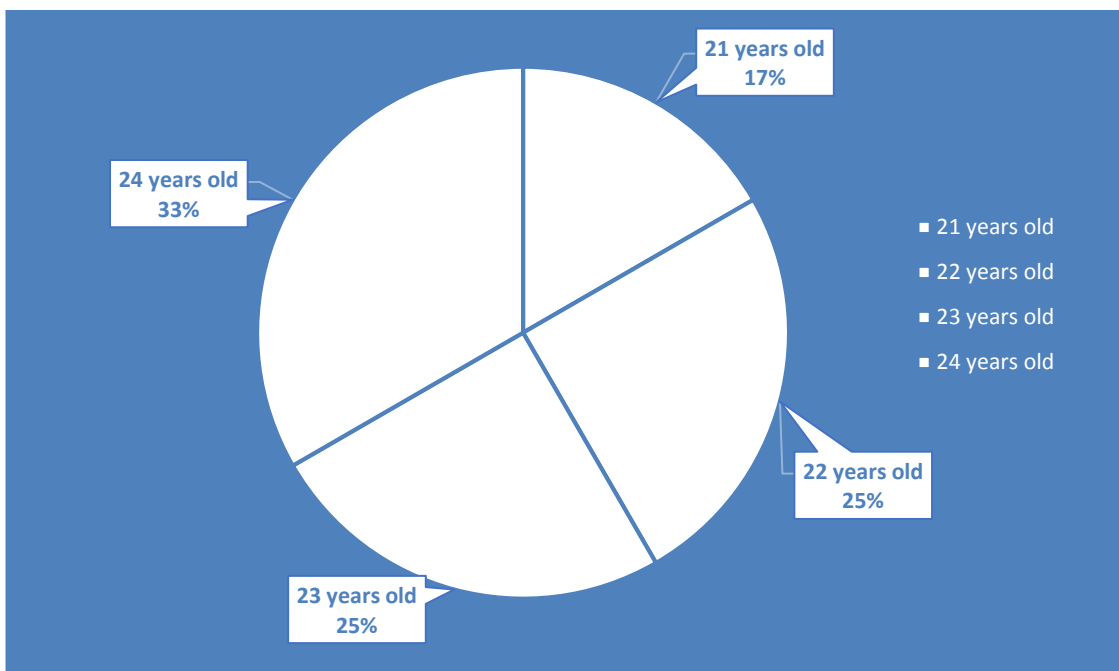
Figure 5 Participants' age

6.5 Analysis method: coding approach

An important step of data analysis is coding. Understanding nature of words from respondents is one challenge to the author; hence, with the guide from a blog post of Gallicano (2013), coding approach was performed. According to

Gallicano (2013), the first level of qualitative data coding is called "open code". At this stage, after reviewing the responses several times, the author started with highlighting and labeling words and phrases which present same meaning. Then, it is imperative to record respondents' words and create properties for each code. This facilitated all the future tasks with clarity and prevented missing anything from chunks of data. There are also two higher levels of coding, called "axial coding" and "selective coding"; nonetheless, as this study is considered thematic, these two coding levels are not necessarily included. (Gallicano 2013.) Instead, the author gathered the open codes based on the literature reviewed in the theory part, presented in bullet 7 of this thesis paper.

7 Results

7.1 Asian students' preferences on European destinations

The aim of this part of the research is to figure out what Asian students prefer when choosing European destination for leisure travel. The researcher investigated not only desires built from past travel experiences but also wishes as well as deal-breakers for future travel plans of target group.

7.1.1 Scenery and natural assets

Mentioning European travel destinations, many participants related that scenery and nature assets are one of the main reasons for them to consider a destination as "must-visit"; moreover, visiting a destination to experience nature is becoming travel motivation of Asian student travellers. Nine over 12 participants mentioned keywords such as "nice nature", "beautiful cities", "beautiful scenery", etc. when described "must-visit" and next-to-visit European destinations the names of which they already had in mind. Specifically, some could clearly narrate their travel experiences:

"I visited Salzburg because I wanted to go to Hallstatt, which is famous for its scenery." (S2)

"Cantania and Syracuse are in Southern Italy which are close to my current internship location. They are beautiful cities with untouched natural attractions (…) the view is amazing." (S3)

"The cities on Southern Spain are very beautiful during the summer and have a lot of beach related activities which I love to do." (OS5)

"I wanted to visit cities with a lot of snow to learn how to ski and to see Santa Claus (…) (OS2)

"I decided to visit those since they are all nice cities. I really like nature trips and they are just perfect for me! When you have a chance to drive a car instead of taking public transport, there are more of nature and beautiful scenery to discover which is eye-opening" (OS6)

Others, when discussing about the European cities they would like to visit soon, these participants expressed their intentions to experience the uniqueness of nature in the destinations for once in their lifetime, for entertainment purpose, or simply for their own travel preference.

"Glad you ask, I'm researching to make this trip real. So basically, the Northern Lights are the main motivation. And I also want to see how beautiful the natural landscapes in the Scandinavian region are." (S5)

"I thought every student got Ibiza on their bucket list? Just kidding! (…) I heard Ibiza has a lot of beautiful beaches and view from the island is awesome." (S3)

"(…) The weather of Mediterranean region is very nice in summer." (OS2)

"(…) It is because of their different cultures and nature. (…) I tend to visit monuments and nature when traveling." (OS6)

Furthermore, there are 6 out of 12 participants who imagined themselves go sightseeing when traveling in Europe; hence, a destination with stunning scenery has been noticed and visited more by Asian student travellers. On the other hand, half of the respondents expressed that natural disaster/threats would pre-

vent them from visiting a destination. In other words, such severe weather conditions could be the deal-breaker, lessening their desires to travel.

"In my opinion, I think nobody wants to go to a place that they already know it is dangerous there. (…) I mean for me, I never want to go to somewhere that is too cold. In Europe, for example, Nordic countries. I can barely bare the coldness." (S4)

7.1.2 Culture and history

Culture and history was reported to be the most common purpose for all participants when traveling around Europe. From curiosity for different and new cultures to wishes to visit famous cultural attractions as well as wanting to be like locals and eat like locals, exploring and experiencing culture and history makes up most of the trips of Asian student travellers. Moreover, it has long become the motivation to travel in Europe for the target group. For example, a respondent studying in the United States of America, who has never been to the continent, described his European "must-visit" destinations:

"Barcelona is the most popular Spanish city in my opinion, with lots of culture and mysteries. I heard a lot about the city which is full of interesting and unusual arts and architectures (…). About Rome, it used to be the centre of the World and the European Civilization. Lots of amazing Catholic churches date back thousands of years. It also has a lot of famous attractions like Vatican City and The Colosseum. I also want to try out the Italian-style pizza. (…)" (S1)

In addition, such "famous", "unique" and "iconic" are the adjectives the respondents used when relating to their European travel preferences. In other words, there was high chance that Asian student travellers visit the destination if the place is special. These statements are specific instances:

"(…) these cities have many cultural attractions and sight-seeing. For example, Rome has Colosseum and Paris has Eiffel Tower. Amsterdam is famous for its channels." (S2)

"Amsterdam has so many cool museums like the Torture Museum, Body World, Anna Frank, Van Gogh Museum, etc. (…) About Bruges, I can tell the whole

city keeps its own history and culture within the architecture, which was very interesting for me to know when I came there. And Barcelona: Mostly because of the Sagrada Família and The Camp Nou. These two are like signatures of the city." (S3)

"Amsterdam is really unique because you can get lost into the small streets along the canals and actually feeling like local people. (…) There are nice museums around the city too. For Budapest, It's a historical city with beautiful bridges and town hall (…). The swimming pool, I mean the thermal bath, is fun as well." (S4)

"Because these three cities have their own uniqueness comparing to other cities in Europe that I went to. Prague has the most beautiful Old Town Square in Europe (…). Rome is definitely a must because it has the most unique attractions such as The Colosseum and The Vatican City." (S5)

"They are unique because of their cultures. London is very fancy, Amsterdam has the vintage feeling and Paris is just beautifully romantic. Also, they have popular places that I want to go to such as Eiffel Tower, Amsterdam channel, the Big Ben." (OS3)

Not only for experience, Asian student travellers also went for exploration purposes. Some examples shared:

"Zagreb would be one of my next destinations because I'm recently interested in exploring the Croatian culture." (S3)

"I'd like to come to Brussels for the beers and the architecture. On the other hand, the historic Berlin wall and the Holocaust museum are what I'm interested in when visiting Berlin." (OS4)

"I just want to see the difference between the Portuguese and the Spanish culture." (OS5)

7.1.3 Well-known destinations

Well-known, or famous destinations are also listed in the Asian students' travel preferences. In other words, some participants confirmed they tend to visit a European destination when it is world-wide famous, or when it is recommended by their friends or acquaintances. In other circumstances, the destinations were preferred due to their long-time exposure to images and information of them on the Internet. More than three participants shared in the interviews and online survey responses when being asked why they consider a destination is a European "must-visit" and what their inspiration to travel is:

"It is a sure thing that these cities are worth visiting because they are all really famous. (…) I wanted to go to Hallstatt, which is famous for its scenery. I saw pictures of the place on the Instagram and they are truly inspiring. Hallstatt has been on my travel bucket list for a while. (…) many of my friends who already visited these two recommend them, so yeah, my next holiday would be either Lisbon, or Copenhagen." (S2)

"I applied for a UK visa and it last for 6 months, so I decided to go to as many cities as I can. And they are very famous among my friends since they all recommend them for me." (S5)

"Because they are all very well known among people who want to travel to Europe, at least for people around me here in the States. They all have a lot of iconic monuments like The Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, The Colosseum, Vatican City, and so on." (S6)

"They are one of the most visited cities in Europe because of their famous attractions and they have a really good advertising which makes tourists from even far away know about the cities and dream of visiting them." (OS5)

7.1.4 Local services and attitudes

Local services and attitudes have always directly influenced the satisfaction level of tourists and travellers in a travel destination. However, participants in this research illustrated the fact that it can affect their travel preferences as well. Half of them indicated themselves not wanting to visit cities in Europe that have

poor public transportation network, plus local people cannot or are not willing to communicate in English. Meanwhile, 4 participants shared that local services and attitudes contribute to the success of a destination to be worth visiting.

"So, I have been studying here in Finland for almost 4 years and most of my friends who also study here have been to these 3 cities (Rome, Paris, Amsterdam). (…) Moreover, all these are student-friendly cities with students' discounts, for instance, public transport and entrance fees. I think this is a big plus that pulls more and more students like us coming to these cities." (S2)

"The atmosphere is very active but very relaxing at the same time, everyone seems to be friendly. (…) Yes, this makes me feel belong and I actually feel like a local walking the streets. Don't you think that is one of the best parts of travelling?" (S4)

OS5 and S6 both agreed on how local services significantly supports a successful destination to students like Paris, Rome, Amsterdam and Madrid. They implied the satisfaction within their statements:

"The cities are also very easy to fly to and the services for tourists like tour buses or tour guides and maps, are very good." (OS5)

"Those cities are also very touristic, so it is not hard to plan a trip or to find accommodation, transportation, food, etc. (…) Yes, of course this would help a lot for someone living far away from the continent like me." (S6)

7.1.5 Entertainment

Beside experience and exploration, entertainment is considered as one basic need of youth travel. During the trips, Asian students kept themselves entertained with their hobbies. Six out of 12 participants pointed out that they would go shopping or looking for other entertainment such as going to local bars or parties when traveling in European destinations. In some cases, the participants planned to travel so as to satisfy their pastimes.

"The cities in Southern Spain are very beautiful during the summer and have a lot of beach related activities which I love to do." (OS5)

"Munich, I chose it as a must-visit because of the beer festival; and Amsterdam for the marijuana." (OS6)

"Those cities (Cantania and Syracuse) also have very nice trekking pathways which fits my hobby of trekking. (…) You know, students like me always want to go to Ibiza, mostly for partying. Rumour has it that they throw great parties on the island." (S3)

"I'm a huge football fan so I would like to see the stadiums of Real Madrid and Barcelona because they are the biggest clubs in the world." (S4)

7.1.6 Safety

Safety issues at a travel destination ranging from theft, snatching, pickpocketing to natural disaster threats or terrorism threats do influence travel preferences of the target group. Nine participants mentioned that they strictly would not come to a place where it is unsafe owing to political issues or terrorism happening. An example shared by S1, who has never come to Europe:

"I don't want to come to those cities that are currently having terrorism issues. Especially recently the news is all about terrorism in Europe. (…) I think after some time, people still go there to travel, but not just in the heat of the moment." (S1)

The expression of other participants was quite the same when being asked about what prevents them from traveling to European cities. Meanwhile, minor crimes at a travel destination such as snatching, or pickpocketing or public scams do not seem to be the deal-breaker for Asian student travellers to visit a European destination; however, these crimes decreased their desire when traveling alone.

"Traveling alone, I will not choose destination that is unsafe, a destination where you have a high chance to be assaulted or be robbed on the street. On the other hand, when traveling in a group, I feel more comfortable choosing a destination without worrying much about the safety of the area." (S6)

7.1.7 Proximity and price

Surprisingly not mentioned as much as other factors, proximity and price seem insignificant to Asian student traveller's preferences. Some of the respondents agreed that they tend to travel to cities which are close to where they study or do internship. Hence, proximity results in cheaper flight ticket.

"It's close to where I live, and it's well known for its culture and history." (OS1)

"I just want to go to the South side of Spain because I am on my internship in Spain." (OS5)

"Lastly, I visited Helsinki because it is close to where I study." (S2)

Additionally, 4 respondents in the research revealed that as students, they would not travel to "too expensive" cities in Europe. However, the preciseness of how much "too expensive" is to them was vaguely replied.

"It's near where I study so it's cheaper than flying to other cities. (…) Too expensive and too cold are two things that make me not wanting to visit a destination. (…) Too expensive is like, how to say, out of my budget, you know." (S4)

"Cantania and Syracuse are in southern Italy which are close to my current internship location. (…) Not for those cities that everything is too expensive, I think I won't go there in the near future." (S3)

7.2 Asian students' choice criteria on leisure accommodation (STRs)

7.2.1 Criteria for the accommodation

7.2.1.1 Overall condition
Overall condition including living space cleanliness and room temperature should be up to basic level. This criterion seems to be ordinary, however, was considered important to guests as Asian student travellers. Half of the participants expressed that cleanliness is one of the "must-have" characteristics of a STR for leisure trips. Moreover, three of those confirmed that their dream accommodation when travelling should be clean and comfortable. Here below is an example from one interviewee:

"A dream place for leisure trip to me is very simple: clean toilet, a comfortable bed and close to the city centre. Nobody wants to stay in a dirty place after a long day out." (S4)

In other cases, worst experiences when staying in a STR were narrated by participants. Poor overall room condition was mentioned in 4 responses, stating that they would never go back to that STR and had written bad reviews for these accommodations.

"I never really had a bad experience regarding the accommodation. I guess the worst was when the place was too far from the transportation and was not very clean even for my pretty low standards." (S1)

"When I went to Helsinki to visit my friend. I rented a house in Airbnb and it was very far away from the train station and the city centre and the heater did not work which made me sleep with my coat on. The house is very old and has an old smell (…) Worst holiday ever." (S4)

7.2.1.2 Accommodation space

However big the rental space of a STR is to the participants it may not reflect in their responses on "must-have" characteristics of a leisure accommodation. Nevertheless, they did complain about small room and listed a spacious place as their dream accommodation.

"The room was too small and unclean. That did not seem like what we saw in the photos they uploaded on Airbnb. (...)" (OS3)

"Me and my friends once visited in Brussels and stayed with a host in Airbnb. The place was way smaller than the what the pictures told us. I've been in this situation more than 2 times already when the pictures were lying. The place was more or less a scam." (S3)

"My dream accommodation is a really big house with all the privacy and very close to the shopping centre and the view outside is fantastic." (S5)

"A dream accommodation of mine would be a huge place that is beautifully decorated according to the city culture and history. (...)" (S6)

"I'd like to stay in a big entire house which is close to the city centre and has a kitchen because I like to cook." (OS5)

In short, it can be concluded that a spacious accommodation was preferred by only part of the participants. Notwithstanding, small rental space can lower their satisfaction of the stay and the accommodation.

7.2.1.3 Location

The criterion location refers to the proximity of STR to public transportation, city centre, shopping malls or nearby convenience stores. It shows in the research that 7 of 12 participants considered location of STR a significant characteristic of their preferred accommodation for leisure traveling.

"A cosy room in the centre of the city or near my destination is my dream accommodation. (…) With that I can at the same time feel like a local and can easily access to what I need." (S2)

"(...) And it would be very nice, of course, if I could find a place close to the city centre with reasonable price. If not, as long as the accommodation is nearby public transport, it is fine for me." (S4)

"(...) What else of a dream accommodation I could think of? Let's see. Oh, it can be very close to the city centre and has all the possible entertainment around.(...)" (S6)

Some participants emphasized on the significance of where the STRs locate. They argued that there was a low chance for them to choose accommodation which is far from public transport; since it is "difficult to access everything".

"(...) One more thing, it must be close to public transportation, for example, bus/tram lines or train station. I once stayed in a place far from the tram line in winter 2016, walking to the tram station was really awful in the cold wind." (S3)

"Beside the cleanliness, the accommodation has to be close to transportation or airport. Since if it was located far away, I think it would be difficult to access everything." (S5)

7.2.1.4 Privacy

It is normal for many STR that guests share the place rented with others such as hosts or other guests. Nonetheless, to 5 of the participants when being asked, they insisted the STR to rent must be private. Among those, two interviewees revealed:

"I don't feel comfortable when I have to share toilet and bathroom with the others, no matter if it is the host or other guests. So I think for me, the first "must-have" of an accommodation should be private toilet and bathroom.(…)" (S2)

"I always choose a room, or a place that is private. I mean, a place that is not shared with guests would make me more comfortable, because I don't want others to touch my luggage when I'm out in the morning as well as I want some time alone when I come back." (S5)

Others who have done the online survey of this research also listed "privacy" in the must-have characteristics of a STR for leisure traveling. Furthermore, a private place was more preferred to be rented by the target group when they travel with their friends and family. Beside those who confirmed they had never travelled alone before, the other pointed out the difference between choosing an accommodation for one self and for a group is privacy and larger type of rentals.

"Yes, there is this difference: the accommodation must be bigger, and privacy is needed when traveling with others." (OS4)

"Traveling alone, I don't mind staying in a shared bedroom and toilet. Traveling with others, we would prefer to have our own place." (S3)

"When traveling together I prefer to stay in Airbnb rentals to have the whole studio or apartment so we can do whatever we want. When traveling alone, a private room is OK, I don't mind sharing toilet and kitchen with others." (S5)

"Traveling together, the accommodation must be spacey, and I would prefer to have the whole place for ourselves without sharing with other unknown guests." (S6)

7.2.1.5 Basic amenities

This criterion relates to all the basic amenities included in the rent of the accommodation, such as hot water, electricity, Wi-Fi, comfortable bed, heater, etc. Especially, for a young the target group, the access to Internet on their handphones or laptops using Wi-Fi was emphasized.

"The worst memory I have about renting a place for vacation is that the cell phone connection and Wi-Fi were very bad, so I could not communicate with my family or use data. The utilities were also very terrible with no hot water or usable heating system." (S6)

For most of us, a rented room with well working amenities is the least to expect when traveling. Likewise, participants of the research agreed the same.

"To me, all the amenities must be good. For example, hot water works well, strong Wi-Fi signal, everything is easy to find." (OS2)

"The amenities like water, electricity and internet are must-have. Other things are not so important if the rental rate is cheap." (S1)

"There must be working internet, heater, water and electricity. Especially, Internet is an important thing, frankly saying." (S3)

Additionally, in these cases, the interviewee expected the amenities must work well if they are advertised online. Otherwise, it would affect their overall satisfaction and reputation of the host when posting falsely.

"Oh, the last thing is that utilities should be working well. (…) Like I told you before about my worst experience in Budapest, the house electricity shut down and we had no hot water and light and internet for 1 day, so I had to move out to another hotel." (S5)

"The place itself must be cleaned and have all the utilities as advertised. It means that if they shared on Airbnb that they have Wi-Fi access, or they have a TV, all should work normally. Don't advertise if those are broken or do not work properly." (S6)

7.2.1.6 Price

There is always a stereotype that students spend less than other groups when traveling. However, when being asked about budget for leisure accommodation, two participants answered:

"You get what you pay for and I don't mind paying more to get more." (S1)

"I don't mind paying a lot for the accommodation that matches all my wishes." (S5)

This implies the truth that not all students have little travel budget. When it comes to leisure travel, part of the target group, Asian student travellers, would spend more on their relaxation purpose. However, most of the participants stated their range of budget for accommodation (for 1 person) when leisurely travel in European cities is between 20 and 100 euros. Nevertheless, there are services that all the participants agreed to pay additionally to enjoy, such as pick-up or drop-off at the airport, breakfast, car rental, portable Wi-Fi, guided tour by the host, etc.

7.2.2 Criteria for STR's hosts

7.2.2.1 Responsive and communicative

One of the differences between hotel accommodation and STR is the importance and input of the host. He/ she would be the one giving guests first impression on the overall lodging service. Moreover, a lot of communication happens during the guests' stays. Thus, the hosts of STRs should be responsive and communicative. In other words, he/she must have the ability to communicate with guests verbally; simultaneously, being available to answer questions from guests in the time needed. Half of the participants in the research reported their worst experience when staying in a STR regarded difficulties in contact and communication with hosts. In some case, the hosts were out of reach.

"(...) The host could not be contacted and was rude to me and my friend when I tried to reach him." (OS3)

"When I went to Helsinki to visit my friend. I rent a house in Airbnb and it was very far away from the train station and the city centre and the heater did not

work which made me sleep with my coat on. The house was very old and had an old smell. I tried to reach the owner for several questions and complaints, she did not respond to my message at all." (S4)

On the other hand, some of the participants complained about hosts who either could not speak English or were not willing to speak English. In these cases, language could be the barrier for Asian students who travel in Europe.

"The least satisfying experience of mine happened when I stayed in Paris, the host could not speak English at all! It took nearly half an hour to find out where he put the keys because he couldn't show up for us. He could have had clear instruction with pictures but no, he insisted talking on the phone in French and none of us could understand. That's insane." (S2)

"Me and my friends once visited in Brussels and stayed with a host in Airbnb. (...) And during our stay, the host did not complain anything until she could make a review on us, she started to write a complaint in French although we did not cause anything. She could have just told us when we were staying at the place." (S3)

Expectation on smooth communication with hosts of STRs among the respondents was fairly high. Five over 12 respondents preferred hosts that can speak English and quickly respond to their questions. Two participants even emphasized on the importance of a responsive and communicative host by insisting that:

"The landlord must be quick to respond and easy to reach, that is one of the must-have characteristics of a STR, because if not, I'd rather stay in the hostel." (S4)

"For me, when I rent a place on Airbnb, I have to make sure that the owner must be responsive (...). (S6)

7.2.2.2 Respect privacy

Another criterion regarding hosts among Asian students when traveling in Europe is respecting privacy. Most of the participants expected hosts to give them time alone and not to be intrusive. Instances from two participants stating:

"My worst experience was that one host who didn't respect my privacy and kept on going to my room without knocking." (OS1)

"(…) I found it very uncomfortable and weird about the host in Paris. Early in the morning, the last morning we stayed there, when my friends and I were sleeping, he came into the room without noticing us. It was kind of creepy when he just came, had a look then said nothing and left." (S2)

Respecting privacy of guests was considered as one of the most preferable characteristics of a STR host among the participants. Five of 12 respondents stated clearly that if the hosts were respectful and valued guests' privacy, their stay would be most comfortable and memorable.

7.2.2.3 Friendly and helpful

Friendly people make the others feel at ease to be-friend with. This common sense applied as well to the target group when traveling in Europe. In other words, the host was considered a new friend they made during their trips. "Friendly", "willing to help" and "supportive" were the most frequent keywords that all participants used to describe an ideal host. Furthermore, some of them expected beyond friendly hosts, idealizing host as a cool and knowledgeable person who can recommend them decent places and give useful tips for their journeys.

"I would love to meet a friendly and knowledgeable host who can inspire and tell me interesting stories about the city. Especially when traveling alone, a local host seems like an interesting new friend to me." (S1)

"Firstly, the host has to be an English-speaking person who is very friendly and respect my privacy. Secondly, he or she should be responsive to my questions and always willing to help. Lastly but also important, I like one who is cool that knows secret places around the city." (S3)

Part of this research also proved the hosts' great contribution to guests' satisfaction on an STR. For instance, when describing their dream accommodation for leisure trips in Europe, two respondents of the online open-ended survey

only mentioned their wishes about the host, meanwhile indicated nothing about the accommodation itself:

"My dream accommodation is which has an understanding host who respects my privacy and can actually recommend hidden gem of the city instead of just mainstream places." (OS1)

"A dream accommodation to me should have a funny and friendly host who is willing to bring us around the city and is clean." (OS3)

On the other hand, in contrast with an ideal host, a rude and racist host was also referred to as the worst experiences of the participants when staying in a STR. These two cases are the examples.

"We left our luggage at the place and the host threw it out on the street." (OS4)

"The worst experience I had about accommodation was when the host was very racist and tried to make us pay more because we checked in late and that we asked him to book a taxi to the airport which is stupid, it was just a call!!" (OS5)

7.3 Significant factors affecting Asian student travellers' purchasing process

Considered as "the best-known sharing economy platform for accommodation", it is not a surprise for the author when all of the respondents, when asked about the most used platform to look for an STR, mentioned Airbnb. There are also other platforms mentioned (Booking.com, Agoda, HotelWorld.com) but Airbnb is undoubtedly far ahead. Based on the data analysis, the following factors elaborated below are believed to be significant for the purchasing process of Asian students as travellers.

7.3.1 Reviews and rating

Reviews and ratings are considered significant factors that influence Asian student travellers during their purchasing process. Among twelve participants, there are 10 respondents who admit comparing the reviews between accommodations when looking for an accommodation. Specifically, the respondents

take cleanliness of the place into consideration and suggested that negative reviews about sanitation affect their decision. For instance:

"(…) if there are a lot of reviews that the host did not clean the house before the new guests show up, I will automatically move on to the next place." (S2)

"(…) For the reviews, recent reviews that say something like the place is too dirty, not clean, etc. when I see those reviews, I don't really want to stay there anymore." (S4).

Reviews about the host are also looked into when deciding on the accommodation. The respondents believed reviews, mentioning how the guests were treated by the hosts, are crucial. Negative reviews in which the hosts are described as rude, racist, unfriendly or offensive are considered deal-breakers for the Asian students travellers.

"The place isn't clean, and the host is rude" (OS1)

"(…) or the host did something offensive to the guests. Even if there is only one negative review, that would be enough for me…" (S4)

"I don't like and will not choose places with negative reviews about the host of how he's not responsive to the guest's questions, the hosts being racist and rude toward the guests or that the host did not present what they advertised on Airbnb." (S1)

Not only the content of the negative reviews is concerned, the frequency of the negative reviews also contributes to the purchasing decision making process of the travellers. The more frequent the negative reviews, the less likely the respondents choose to stay in that accommodation. For example:

"It's not about the content of the review but the frequency of them. If there are a lot of bad reviews, I will not choose that place" (S6)

"If there are too many negative reviews that are posted recently, I will not choose that place." (S3)

7.3.2 Price

The cost of the accommodation is also noted to be the influencer. Based on the analysis, six of the twelve participants consider the price before proceeding with their decision process. Hence, it is acknowledged that finding an affordable option is very important for the Asian student's traveling purchasing process. There are also cases where price and reviews are considered as a sequence of thoughts. Examples are as follow:

"(…) the price and the reviews, price wise, of course I would always check for the price first, sorting out the listings of which the cost is at my preferable range. Then I would start checking the reviews." (S4)

"Definitely the price and the review. Usually I will look at the review, find places with five stars and then the price." (S1)

7.3.3 Location

Ranking behind only price and reviews, the location is also an important factor that affects the target group purchasing process. There are four responses which include location as one of the decisive factors initiating their booking decision. Moreover, the cases also show that being close to or in the city centre, where most of the attractions and entertainments are located, is favourable. For instance, when comparing two STRs, these respondents replied:

"I would take location and rates into consideration" (OS6)

"price and distance" (OS2)

"To me, they are reviews, price, distance to the city centre." (S2)

"The location and the services offered definitely. For me, I like to have a nice and quiet place (...) and the house must be close to the shopping centre (…)" (S5)

7.3.4 Host

Last but not least, the host of the accommodation can clearly affect the decision-making process of the author's target group. The manner of the landlord, specifically how friendly and respectful they are, is valued greatly. Besides checking the reviews, the respondents also read through the introduction and detail information of the host. It appears that the presentation of the host on the purchasing platform (Airbnb, Booking.com, Agoda, HotelWorlds.com) is crucial. An appropriate, well-presented introduction and display can affect positively the purchasing process. For instance:

"I don't like and will not choose places with negative reviews about the host (...) Also, sometimes, looking at the bio of the hosts, you can tell how friendly and respectful they are. Like one time when I saw a place where the host has a great sense of humour in the way he writes about himself and his own house." (S1)

"The place isn't clean, and the host is rude." (OS5)

8 Summary and Discussion

Student travel has recently been a noticeable topic among tourism researchers and scholars, owing to the increase of youth travelling around the globe. Looking into a huge number of Asian students who are likely to travel long distance to Europe, the author found it intriguing and passionate to write her bachelor's thesis about the topic for further understanding and exploration. Unlike other research on statistics of the mentioned topic, this thesis has investigated insights of the target group, Asian student travellers, concerning their preferences and behaviours when traveling in Europe. Hence, the research question, "what are the in-depth thoughts and decisive factors of the above-mentioned target group in choosing destination and accommodation for their trips in Europe?", was presented to simplify two main aims of the study: (1) to figure out Asian student travellers' preferences on destinations and accommodation in Europe, (2) to determine the most decisive factors during their booking process. The author believed qualitative research method to be suitable to achieve the the-

sis's goals. There were two tools used simultaneously, semi-structured interview and open-ended online survey, to obtain empirical results for the study.

This thesis comprises two main parts, theory and empirical part. The theory part consists of four chapters: student travel, European travel destination favourites of students, accommodation preferences of student travellers, and purchasing process of travel products. Content of the theory part is believed to demonstrate and familiarise readers with the literature related to the research topic. On the other hand, description of research process and research results were written in the empirical part, providing details of the collection and analysis of primary data.

The conducted research answered the main question and accomplished the thesis's aims, presented in three main themes: Asian student travellers' preferences on European destinations, Asian student travellers' choice criteria on STRs, Asian student travellers' decisive factors of purchase process.

1. The first theme of the result describes which European destinations attract Asian students for leisure travel; reasons being scenery and natural assets, culture and history, well-known destinations, local services and attitudes, entertainment, safety, proximity and price.
2. The second theme illustrates the target group's choice criteria in choosing STRs, including the accommodation's overall condition, space, location, privacy, basic amenities and price, as well as the host's characteristics: being responsive and communicative, respecting privacy, being friendly and helpful.
3. The last theme elaborates significant factors that influence Asian student travellers during their purchasing process. They are reviews and ratings, cost of the accommodation, STR location, and the host of STR.

Preferences on European destinations and in-depth thoughts of Asian student travellers were determined. According to the research results, the target group expressed their intentions to experience the uniqueness of nature in the destinations for once in their lifetime, for entertainment purpose, or simply for their own travel preference. It was also found out that destinations with stunning

scenery have been noticed and visited more by Asian student travellers; and that severe weather conditions could be the deal-breaker, lessening their desires to travel there. On the other hand, from curiosity for different and new cultures to wishes to visit famous cultural attractions as well as wanting to be like locals and eat like locals, exploring and experiencing culture and history have long become the target group's motivation to travel in Europe and makes up most of the trips of Asian student travellers. Furthermore, some participants confirmed they tend to visit a European destination when it is world-wide famous, or when it is recommended by their friends or acquaintances. In other circumstances, the destinations are preferred due to their long-time exposure to images and information of them on the Internet. Besides, findings of this research show that poor public transportation network and local people not willing to communicate in English in one destination can prevent the target group from visiting there. Another pattern in preference of Asian student travellers illustrated in the research is discovered, which indicates traveling to Europe is to satisfy their hobbies and seek entertainment. In addition, travel preference of the target group is also affected by safety issues. They strictly would not come to a place where it is unsafe owing to political issues or terrorism. Meanwhile, though minor crimes at a travel destination such as snatching, or pickpocketing or public scams may not be the deal-breaker to visit a European destination, they decrease the desire of the target group to travel alone. Lastly, it is revealed that proximity and price seem surprisingly insignificant to Asian student traveller's preferences. However, part of them agreed on their intentions to travel to cities which are close to where they study or do internship, meanwhile, not to "too expensive" cities in Europe; although the preciseness of how much "too expensive" is to them is vague.

Also, in the study, STRs choice criteria of the target group are discussed. Regarding the accommodation itself, firstly, such poor overall room condition results in the bad reviews and the intention not to come back to the place of some respondents. Cleanliness is discovered as one of the "must-have" characteristics of a STR for leisure trips. Secondly, it can be concluded that a spacious accommodation was preferred by only part of the participants. However, small rental space can lower their satisfaction of the stay and the accommodation.

Thirdly, a STR which is close to public transportation, city centre, shopping malls or nearby convenience stores gets higher chance to be chosen by the target group. Moreover, a private place is more preferred to be rented by Asian students than that shared with other guests or host, particularly when they travel with their friends and family. Also, they expect all the basic amenities included in the rent of the accommodation, such as hot water, electricity, Wi-Fi, comfortable bed, heater, etc. work well if they are advertised online. Otherwise, it would affect their overall satisfaction and reputation of the host when posting falsely. The study results also suggest the target group's developing pattern of spending more on relaxation purpose when leisurely travel. There are services that all the participants agreed to pay additionally to enjoy, such as pick-up or drop-off at the airport, breakfast, car rental, portable Wi-Fi, guided tour by the host, etc. On the other hand, regarding choice criteria on hosts of STR, Asian student travellers prefer the ability to communicate with guests verbally, and simultaneously, the availability to answer questions from guests in the time needed. Difficulties in contact and communication with hosts owing to hosts not speaking English lead to complaints and lower guests' satisfaction. Also, most of the participants expect hosts to give them time alone and not to be intrusive, in other words, respect their privacy. Most of all, an ideal host to the target group is reckoned to be a friendly and helpful person. a cool and knowledgeable person who can recommend them decent places and give useful tips for their journeys, which may exceed Asian student travellers' expectation on STR hosts. Contrastingly, a rude and racist host is referred to as the worst experiences of the participants when staying in a STR.

The research as well suggests significant factors that influence Asian student travellers during their purchasing process, firstly, reviews and ratings of the STR. Not only the content of the reviews but also frequency of negative reviews contributes to the purchasing decision making process of the travellers. Specifically, negative reviews about sanitation are indicted to affect Asian students' booking decision. Also, negative reviews in which the hosts are described as rude, racist, unfriendly or offensive are considered deal-breakers for the Asian students travellers. Secondly, another influencer discovered in this research is the cost of the accommodation. It is acknowledged that finding an affordable

option is very important for the Asian students' traveling purchasing process. Thirdly, the cases also show that being close to or in the city centre, where most of the attractions and entertainments are located, is one of the decisive factors initiating their booking decision. In addition, location of STRs is also a criterion that Asian student travellers use to compare between two lodgings. Lastly, the manner of the landlord, specifically how friendly, communicative and respectful they are, significantly and positively affect the target group's booking decision. It appears that the presentation of the host on the purchasing platform (Airbnb, Booking.com, Agoda, HotelWorlds.com) is crucial. It is because reading through the introduction and detail information of the host as well as checking the reviews are how Asian student travellers evaluate the above-mentioned factors.

In conclusion, this thesis should provide initial findings for further research regarding guests' insights, particularly Asian students as travellers. On the other hand, this could be considered as a guide for STR hosts to improve their lodging business so as to have higher bed occupancy and guests' satisfaction. While encouraging current and future hosts of STR to deliver better product and service for target customers, the author had the opportunity to satisfy her own interest in short-term lodging business and to earn knowledge of travel purchasing process from an international point of view regarding vacation rentals.

9 Tables

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Interview/ Open-ended survey Structure

A. Introduction

Dear students,

My name is Nhu Nguyen and I am a senior student majoring in Hospitality Management at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences in Finland. I am conducting a research study in terms of my bachelor thesis on Asian students' travel preferences and purchase process, specifically with respect to leisure travel in Europe. More precisely, I wish to understand your perceptions of an ideal accommodation and favorite destinations in Europe in order to make your European holiday a memorable experience.

This open-ended survey may take at most 20 minutes of your time. It consists of 4 parts. Each part comprises fewer than 9 questions. Your name and other personal information will not be recorded from the interview/survey, only your age and nationality.

B. Your background

1. How old are you?
2. What is your nationality?
3. In which country are you currently studying?

C. Preferences on European destination

This part consists of 9 questions. Questions no.3 and 4 are only for respondents who have already traveled within Europe.

1. As a student, which city/cities in Europe you consider as a "must-visit" destination?
2. What makes you think so?
3. Name 3 European cities you have visited most recently.
4. What inspired you to visit those?
5. Which European city/cities would you like to visit soon?
6. What motivates/inspires you to go there?
7. Choosing a destination, are there any differences between traveling alone and traveling with others? If yes, what are those?
8. Imagine you are traveling in a European city, what activities would you do?

9. List 2 things about a European city that makes you NOT wanting to visit there?

D. Preferences and choice criteria of accommodation

In this survey, accommodation mentioned only refers to short-term rentals (STR), not hotels/hostels.

To your knowledge, popular examples of STRs are home-stays, bed & breakfasts, vacation apartment/room rental.

This part consists of 8 questions.

1. What is your worst/ least satisfying experience when staying in a STR, if any?
2. Describe your dream accommodation for leisure trips.
3. What are the "must-have" characteristics of a STR for leisure trips?
4. Which are the amenities of an accommodation that you are willing to pay extra for?
5. What is your range of budget for accommodation (for 1 person) for leisure travel in European cities?
6. Do you prefer if the accommodation host offers free services such as included breakfast or bike rent/lent? What kinds of services would you like the host to offer for free/ at fair price?
7. What characteristics of a host make your stay most comfortable and memorable?
8. Choosing an accommodation, are there any differences between traveling alone and traveling with others? If yes, what are those?

E. Decision-making factors of travel products

This is the last part of the survey. This part consists of 5 questions.

1. On which platforms will you look for an accommodation when planning your travel in Europe? Name your most used platform.
2. What would you compare between 2 choices of STR?
3. What are the negative reviews that significantly affect your booking decision?
4. What are the 3 factors about the host that prevent you from booking the accommodation?

If any, what would you like to add about your decisive factors when booking an accommodation?